

Service Learning &
Volunteer
Programs in Schools

Waukesha County, Wisconsin



THE VOLUNTEER CENTER
of WAUKESHA COUNTY



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The Volunteer Center
of Waukesha County
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introduction

The Volunteer Center of Waukesha County proposes a service learning program at your school, which can consist of one of more of the following components:

- Volunteer involvement leading to credit, grades and/or recognition.
- Service learning programs built into a course curriculum.
- Encouragement of youth and family volunteerism in coordination with your school.
- Encouragement of youth and family volunteerism promoted by your school, yet remaining separate from your school.
- Large group or all-school volunteer efforts.
- Volunteer opportunities developed for students via extra-curricular programs i.e. service clubs.

Service learning is a teaching strategy where, through experiential learning tied to the curriculum, students apply knowledge, skills, critical thinking and wise judgment to address *genuine community needs*. In short, service learning encompasses students providing valuable service to their community as they reflect on that learning in structured ways to enhance their growth. A service learning program in your school will provide students with a wonderful opportunity to be involved in their community, as well as to practice their learning beyond the classroom. Done well, a service learning program has the potential to benefit everyone involved – the learner, the community and its organizations, society and the school.

Youth volunteers have a tremendous potential for involvement in a wide range of activities. Youth can make valuable contributions to their community while gaining valuable life experiences and future career skills.

Adults and educators need to encourage and support volunteerism among young people. According to a recent “Parade” article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 71 percent of adults who began volunteering as a young person become lifelong volunteers. Of course, society benefits greatly from their contributions. People who learn early in life how much satisfaction one receives from giving to others are people who go on to help build and value a caring society. Youth are tomorrow’s leaders. Youth volunteerism helps meet community needs and solves problems. Schools who build service learning objectives into curriculum and encourage community service are viewed as resources to the community. This, in turn, builds support for schools. These are just a few of the benefits to everyone involved with youth volunteering.

For the student, volunteering becomes a learning experience. Students are given an opportunity to develop their potential outside the classroom, as well as experience authentic learning. Students gain first-hand knowledge of community needs and develop new skills. Volunteering increases self-esteem, develops leadership skills and can enhance school performance since problem-solving skills, critical thinking and decision-making skills are all used. By the same token, committing to a volunteer experience is a positive, cognitive decision made by a young person. Clearly, it is an opportunity to journey down the “right path” as opposed to the many negative choices available.

b e n e f i t s

Through community involvement, students have an opportunity to interact with people from age groups, cultural and racial backgrounds, and abilities/disabilities that are different from their own.

An additional benefit to the learner is the opportunity volunteering provides for career exploration. Besides being accountable through consistency and regular attendance, student volunteers gain skills related to specific jobs and learn office and organizational culture.

Through volunteering, students become more engaged in their education and their community. Teachers become mentors and guides, while community members become partners with schools in educating the young. Further, school climate - a major factor in school effectiveness - improves. Service learning is an instructional strategy and not an add-on for teachers. Service learning relates directly to Wisconsin’s Performance Standards.

For the community, creative ideas and solutions are offered for difficult problems, and new energy and commitment emerge for the community and the common good. Through youth volunteerism, communities see youth in a positive light, while a young generation of committed and involved citizens is nurtured.

potential roadblocks to service learning in your school

facts about youth volunteering

- In 2000, the Volunteer Center of Waukesha County made more than 15,000 referrals. More than 4,000 referrals were made to youth ages 17 and under.
- Nationally, 59.9% of teens reported that they had volunteered in 1996. These 13.3 million teen volunteers gave an estimated 3.5 hours per week, totaling 2.4 billion hours of volunteer time.
- Volunteerism is now a key consideration among colleges for admission and scholarship programs.
- Youth volunteering is on the rise. Research released by the Independent Sector in 1995, 1997 and 1999 indicates a nationwide increase in the number of young people who are involved in community service. The University of California-Berkeley notes that volunteering is one of the highest ranked activities in its annual review of college freshmen.

When considering developing a service learning program or providing course credit for volunteerism, you may meet some resistance or reluctance in your school. There may be a concern for maintaining academic standards and a feeling that the school cannot force a student's commitment as a volunteer. Surely, a commitment to serve is a prerequisite for meaningful volunteer activity. Therefore, the service learning program should be an option and not a requirement for a student.

Volunteer experiences become relevant to young people (and all of us!) when students become involved in meaningful experiences rather than obsolete experiences. Volunteerism can be a terrific way to channel the idealism of young people that is reinforced and supported by the school.

Ongoing evaluation is the best way to ensure that academic standards are maintained. It is essential that well-defined objectives are established early, and that the student and program are measured against these objectives throughout the academic year.

role of the volunteer center of waukesha county

The Volunteer Center of Waukesha County can play an important role in the establishment of a service learning initiative in your school. The Volunteer Center is the main resource in the community for the recruitment and referral of volunteers to community agencies and training of agency staff in various aspects of volunteer management. The Volunteer Center has well over 110 member agencies with more than 300 daily opportunities for volunteers. The Volunteer Center can provide you with the necessary expertise to assist you in developing and customizing a program that is best suited to your school or particular course. Our Youth Volunteer Program of the Volunteer Center has staff and resources to link your students with community agencies that can best use their talents and skills. Please call (262) 544-0150 to learn more, or e-mail the Volunteer Center of Waukesha County at vcwauk@execpc.com. You are also invited to visit our Web site at www.volunteerwaukesha.com.

service learning in schools

There are several key elements involved with service learning. First, young people themselves are involved in planning and leading the effort. Second, not only do the students receive personal gratification, their work makes a difference for the agency and the community. Among elementary school students, family volunteer opportunities should be encouraged since young students are typically limited by transportation needs, family commitments, etc. In all situations, volunteering is an option and not a requirement. Finally, their service experiences contribute to and are enhanced by their academic learning and personal growth.

getting started

six steps to success

step one

Contact the Volunteer Center of Waukesha County at (262) 544-0150. The youth volunteer coordinator can work with you, your colleagues and students to develop the most appropriate service learning initiatives for your school. The Volunteer Center can link students, individual classes and school groups with agencies and projects in need of volunteers, as well as customize a program based on the needs of your school.

step two

Meet with your school principal, staff and student council representatives to gain support for a service learning initiative. You may wish to gain support from the school site committee, building leadership teams, and/or citizenship committees. These groups can work with you to help define the extent of the service learning initiative in your school. You may wish to base your decision on factors such as:

- How extensively you want to involve your students in community service, the flexibility of your school's timetable, accessibility of your students.
- Availability of free time for the students.
- The type of classes that service learning can be introduced.
- Staff resources needed to provide support for this program.

step three

If service learning or volunteer initiatives are being planned in the school, a staff person should be appointed as the school coordinator. The school coordinator is the staff liaison between the Volunteer Center, students and school during the program's duration. This person must be an individual who is enthusiastic, responsible and knowledgeable about the program's objectives and the various school activities being undertaken. The coordinator must also be able to relate to other school staff, community agencies and individual students.

As an alternative, your school may find the team approach successful in administering the youth program. A staff advisory committee would then be formed to develop the parameters of the program, oversee and evaluate, maintain contact with participating staff and maintain all necessary records.

At this point, it would be wise to establish objectives for your school's program. Establishing objectives brings authenticity to your program and more clearly defines the program's parameters.

Students may form an advisory committee to organize student initiatives such as displays or a volunteer information day or fair. They could also distribute materials to students about service learning initiatives. A representative of this advisory committee would maintain contact with the staff advisory committee and the Volunteer Center to plan group volunteer initiatives such as food drives, senior citizen projects, etc. The student advisory committee may derive out of a student council organization at your school.

step
four

Begin to raise awareness about the benefits and opportunities of volunteering by educating students, staff and families.

Volunteerism can be introduced by the Volunteer Center through assemblies, class presentations and discussions, video-tapes, cafeteria displays, IMC displays, distribution of materials, posters, bookmarks, staff meetings, announcements, and posting of materials on bulletin boards. Schools may also distribute student opportunity brochures, special event and other flyers from the Volunteer Center. The local newspaper may be contacted to provide coverage on this new initiative or photograph students involved in volunteering.

Students, families and school staff should be encouraged to contact the Volunteer Center to learn more about individual, family, classroom and group volunteer opportunities. Personal interviews are always available with the Volunteer Center to help assess the skills and interests of individuals and match them with a volunteer opportunity. Additionally, the school Web site server can easily establish a link to the Volunteer Center.

step
five

Evaluation will be the best way to ensure the maintenance of academic standards and successful operation of the service learning program. The evaluation should cover three areas: the student volunteer, the program and the community agency. All three components in the program (student, agency and school) should participate in the evaluation along with the Volunteer Center.

step
six

Be certain to inform your parent/teacher association and local board of education about your service learning initiative.

Parental involvement will provide encouragement and support to the student. Informed board of education members can help you raise the profile of your school in the community.

ideas that work

- Be certain to identify, recruit and support a staff person or staff advisory committee from your school to be the liaison between all involved parties.
- Younger students who participate in two volunteer activities over the course of the year and older students participating in four volunteer activities in a year might be recognized by the school (i.e. T-shirt, certificate, award ceremony recognition, etc.)
- Service certificates can be developed, completed and signed by volunteer coordinator. Perhaps a parent volunteer or cooperating staff member could coordinate the paperwork.
- Students receive recognition through the school newsletter and recognition/certificate at year-end assembly.
- Students write a paragraph or illustrate what they learned through their volunteer activity.
- News releases are available from the Volunteer Center for both staff and family newsletters to promote student and family volunteerism.
- All students and staff can receive Student Volunteer booklets and Special Events flyers from the Volunteer Center, or white materials that may be copied at your school. We also encourage promotion of our Web site and encourage a link from the school Web site to the Volunteer Center.
- School develops bulletin board promoting volunteerism and service learning.
- School volunteer develops bulletin board or wall display (i.e. chain of “helping hands”) of which goal is to promote success of completed volunteer projects.
- Web site link added from school to Volunteer Center at www.volunteerwaukesha.com.
- Provide exposure to service learning and the importance of volunteering through talks to classes, newspaper articles, appearances to school boards, Volunteer Center presence at school staff meetings, parent/teacher organizations, etc. Volunteer Center can assist with this publicity.
- Receive ongoing support from Volunteer Center regarding service learning opportunities.

ideas that work

- Develop a before/after school service learning club with clearly stated objectives and mission.
- Investigate the benefits of volunteering as they relate to the Search Institute's "40 Developmental Assets."
- Areas for volunteer involvement/service learning might include involvement with these community issues:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| ■ Animals | ■ Environment |
| ■ Education/Literacy | ■ Domestic Violence/Victim Assistance |
| ■ Community Resource/Referral | ■ Disaster Relief, Pregnancy/Parenting |
| ■ Health Care/Disease Prevention | ■ Homelessness |
| ■ Youth/Families | ■ Hunger |
| ■ Seniors/Elderly | ■ Housing |
| ■ Transportation, | ■ Mental Illness/Depression |
| ■ Developmentally/Physically Disabled | ■ Cultural Awareness |
| ■ Homebound | ■ Substance Abuse |
| ■ Criminal Justice/Rehabilitation | |

- The Volunteer Center staff has a list of successful projects completed by area schools. Call us to learn about these projects and to be connected to a project for your students.
- Some schools have opted for little or no external recognition for participating in volunteer efforts, recognizing the importance of developing intrinsic rewards for such efforts.
- Schools may wish to connect with their local CESA (typically CESA#1 in Waukesha County), as the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction makes available annual service learning workshops and grants through CESA agencies.

The following is a list of possible ways students and teachers might connect classroom learning in specific subject areas to needs in the community.

Please note that many activities are relevant to a number of subject areas. Note also that the examples below assume that an important part of service learning is direct contact between those serving and the people or environment they serve.

english writing

- Study current issues and write stories about them to convey information to peers or to the wider community.
- Read works of literature concerning service-related issues, then write essays connecting the service experience to the literary treatment of the subject. A couple of examples for different issues are: “Flowers for Algernon” and mental retardation or “Silent Spring” and environmental issues.
- After performing service, write stories, poems or plays using the experience as a starting point.
- Write letters to/for a senior citizen.
- Help disabled people write letters and business correspondence.
- Respond to Santa letters.

english journalism

- Write non-profit organizations’ news releases.
- Write stories for weekly neighborhood or small town papers.
- Write brochures or announcements for community events.
- Produce community newspapers.
- Write informative articles on volunteering for the school newspaper.

language arts

- Teach English as a Second Language (ESL) to recent immigrants.
- Assist recent immigrants with basic tasks such as getting phones, learning to use mass transit, or filing immigration papers.
- Translate important government or other documents into languages used by tourists or local residents.
- Plan and make trips to other countries where service is needed.
- Collect clothing or other goods and deliver them to the people in need.

s o c i o l o g y
social studies
p s y c h o l o g y

- Through service, students can learn about different people and cultures. For example, older students studying child development can learn a great deal just by being around young children in day care or classroom settings, and students can learn much about aging by doing home chores for senior citizens. (Note: It is important to involve the people being “studied” in talking about their perceptions and needs, and to give them opportunities to talk with the volunteers about how they feel about young people and service.)
- Counsel peers about current issues.
- Interview recent immigrants or others from different cultures, and then write about their perspectives.
- Research current events and present information on them to younger students or seniors.
- Produce maps for parks, libraries and local organizations.
- Using newspapers, government reports and other sources, research local issues of importance and develop ways of solving the problems.

social studies
h i s t o r y

- Interview senior citizens about their experiences then compile a community history booklet. This could be done for local events such as a flood, a local industry or a particular person. It could also be done around specific national or global events such as World War II, the Civil Rights Movement or the first moon landing.
- Research local property or other community history for community planning projects.
- Make presentations on important historical events to peers or younger students. These could take the form of reenactments, stories, plays, etc.
- Develop neighborhood walking tours or other neighborhood histories.
- Restore local historical or archaeological sites such as farms, important homes, factories, Native American fishing or village sites, etc.

social studies

political science

- Register voters and educate them about the democratic process.
- Conduct public issue or candidate forums.
- Survey youth or other groups about their needs and opinions, and convey this information to policy makers.
- Work with local government or public institutions to help them solve problems such as graffiti, shoplifting, drug use, etc.
- Take on non-partisan public issues and educate the public about them.
- Assist government officials to make forms and other documents attractive and readable.
- Assist immigrants with the process of becoming citizens.
- Become conflict mediators in the school and community.
- Educate peers about the social costs of substance abuse and other key issues.
- Write letters to the editor.
- Write letters to foreign governments to ask for humane treatment of prisoners or do public education work for Amnesty International.

mathematics

- Tutor younger students in math skills.
- Help people process tax returns.
- Conduct surveys on community needs and process and analyze the results.
- Count species or animals or measure and count trees and other plant life for the Department of Natural Resources or Agriculture.
- Calculate needs and measure building materials for construction projects such as installing wheelchair ramps.
- Interview local businesses about how they use

economics

social studies

business

- Young people can perform a number of key functions related to economic development planning. Their research could be coordinated and used by government or non-profit planners.

Possibilities include:

- Inventory local resources.
- Research the economic history of an industry, town or a region.
- Write letters or make phone calls to conduct local or broader market surveys.
- Contact neighboring communities to match up resources and needs.

math in their daily work, and publish the results in a booklet for other math classes. Problems could be included that would show practical applications for a range of math concepts.

- Help food banks, food co-ops or local businesses with their monthly or quarterly inventories.
- Help disabled homebound people with check writing, budgeting, filling out forms, etc.
- Assist small businesses or farms with basic book-keeping such as cross-checking journal entries or totaling columns.

computers

- Train senior citizens in computer use.
- Help disabled people use their computers.
- Run computer programs with local farmers or non-profit organization staff.

industrial a r t s

- Build specialized equipment such as wheelchair ramps.
- Repair small engines for senior citizens or low-income people.
- Teach bicycle repair or other mechanical skills to younger students. This could include bicycle safety.
- Repair senior citizens or disabled persons' homes so they can remain independent.
- Help build low-income housing.
- Design and build public facilities such as playground equipment.
- Examine local problems such as traffic congestion, then research and develop creative solutions. The information and ideas could then be presented to local policy makers.

h o m e economics

- Work with residents of public shelters or other institutions to redesign and fix living rooms or other common spaces.
- Collect and repair clothing and household goods to be sent to areas in need of disaster relief.
- Help establish immigrants in their living quarters by painting, buying household goods, mattresses, etc.
- Help senior citizens or poor people with home budgeting and shopping.
- Convey nutritional information to low-income people.
- Cook and deliver meals to senior citizens or disabled people.
- Provide teen-age mothers with information on nutrition, child development and parenting. Help them with child care and household chores.
- Help consumers to successfully resolve complaints.

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